

Opening Statement
The Honorable Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife
Thursday, April 23, 2009
H.R. 669, *the Nonnative Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act*

The Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife meets this morning to hear testimony regarding, H.R. 669, the Nonnative Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act.

Invasive, non-native species can cause harm to the economy, human health, and the health of other animal species. Damages caused by such species have been generally estimated to cost the American economy over \$120 billion annually. While some of these species have been introduced unintentionally, we clearly now have an increased understanding of the consequences and the costs to the United States taxpayer of incidental introduction as well as the ability now to better assess and mitigate the risks associated with the importation of nonnative wildlife species. Such species as nutria, the snakehead fish, and the Gambian pouch rat have even been knowingly or irresponsibly introduced, damaging natural resources, decreasing recreational revenue and spreading disease.

Currently, under the Lacey Act, invasive species are placed on the “injurious list” when they are deemed to have caused serious and widespread harm to the economy, environment, or human health. Such a listing precludes further importation. On average, it takes the Fish and Wildlife Service four years to list a species as injurious. Because of the time associated with this reactive approach, injurious species can become established in the United States and the costs of control and mitigation have had significant budget impact at all levels of government.

H.R. 669 is oriented toward preventing invasive species from gaining a foothold in U.S. ecosystems. It would establish a science-based risk assessment process for the evaluation of a species prior to its importation. Using this approach, the bill proposes that approved and unapproved lists of species be developed to govern importation. Other countries, including Australia, New Zealand, and Israel have adopted this approach.

Over the past couple of weeks, there have been concerns expressed about the bill and its potential impacts. Much of these concerns are the result of a misunderstanding of what the bill would do. To be clear, this bill is not intended to affect ownership of people’s pets, nor the importation of domesticated or common species. At the same time, we recognize that the bill is by no means perfect, and that changes will be needed to address various concerns before any legislation moves forward. That is the legislative process, and we are only at the beginning of that process.

Indeed, this hearing should be seen as a starting point for a very important discussion. How can we proactively manage the influx of invasive species and reduce

the economic and environmental costs associated with their establishment in the wild, but also be sensitive to legitimate concerns regarding the species that would be affected and realistic about the practicalities of implementation. Today, we will hear some of the many viewpoints on the issue. I look forward to this dialogue.